

Message Text

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12

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /067 W

----- 036891

P R 202125Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7550

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

USDAO/CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 0658

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, TD

SUBJ: POLITICAL/LABOR CRISIS-SITUATION REPORT

1600 MARCH 20

REF: POS 648 AND PREVIOUS

1. ACTIVITY IN TRINIDAD CONTINUED AT A MUCH REDUCED PACE TODAY AS GASOLINE SUPPLIES REMAINED ALMOST NON-EXISTANT. BY THE WEEKEND, THERE WILL BE FEW VEHICLES STILL ON THE ROAD IF THERE IS NO BREAK IN THE SUPPLY IMPASSE CREATED BY THE CONINUING OWTU STRIKE AGAINST TEXACO AND SYMPATHY ACTION BY TANKER TRUCK DRIVERS WORKING FOR THE OTHER PETROLEUM FIRMS.

2. WE HAVE LISTENED TO A REPORTER'S TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS AND BYSTANDERS IMMEDIATELY AFTER UNITED LABOR FRONT (ULF) MARCH WAS BROKEN UP BY POLICE IN SAN FERNANDO TUESDAY MAR 18. TAPES AND EYEWITNESS TALES SEEM TO CONFIRM UNDISCIPLINED POLICE CLUBBING WHICH LED TO SOME INJURIES. THERE ARE

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CONFIRMED REPORTS OF ONE PREGNANT WOMAN BEING SEVERELY STRUCK

BY POLICE AND RUMORS ARE CIRCULATING THAT WOMAN HAS SUBSEQUENTLY DIED. THIS MAY NOT BE TRUE, BUT PRESENT SIGNIFICANCE IS THAT APPARENTLY MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT. IN RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO CHARGES OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND UNNECESSARY VIOLENCE AGAINST PARTICIPANTS IN THE MARCH 18 MARCH AND AGAINST NEWSMEN COVERING THE EVENT, POLICE COMMISSIONER C.A. MAY STATED THAT HE HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF ANY ACTS OF BRUTALITY BUT WOULD WELCOME INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF SUCH ALLEGATIONS. DR. RAMESH MOOTOO, A PROMINENT AND POLITICALLY ACTIVE SAN FERNANDO PHYSICIAN, CHALLENGED THE COMMISSIONER TO COME TO SAN FERNANDO TO SEE THE EVIDENCE OF POLICE BRUTALITY FOR HIMSELF. DLP FACTION LEADER VERNON JAMADAR, WHO WAS BEATEN AND ARRESTED DURING THE MARCH, IS NOW REPORTED TO HAVE COLLAPSED AT HOME AS A RESULT OF HIS INJURIES AND HAS BEEN CONFINED TO BED.

3. TAPE RECORDING OF YESTERDAY AFTERNOON'S RALLY IN WOODFORD SQUARE PORT OF SPAIN (PARA 3 REFTEL) REVEALS THAT SUGAR WORKER LEADER PANDAY IN PRINCIPAL SPEECH LAID STRESS ON NON-VIOLENCE AND EMULATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING AND GHANDI. PANDAY ENUMERATED VARIOUS ISSUES THAT ULF COALITION DIFFERRED WITH GOVERNMENT ON BUT CALLED ON FOLLOWERS NOT TO RESPOND VIOLENTLY TO POLICE CLUBBINGS AND NOT TO HATE POLICE.

4. CHURCH LEADERS HAVE TAKEN ACTIONS IMPLICITLY HIGHLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT AND SYMPATHETIC TO OIL AND SUGAR WORKERS. ANGLICAN BISHOP OPENED CATHEDRAL AND CHURCHES FOR DEMONSTRATORS TO BED DOWN OVERNIGHT LAST NIGHT, AND AFTER POLICE BROKE UP SAN FERNANDO MARCH CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP ISSUED EMOTIONAL DENUNCIATION OF CIOLENCE AND APPEAL TO GOVT TO UNDERSTAND THE COMMON MAN.

5. WE UNDERSTAND FROM RELIABLE SOURCE THAT CARONI, LTD. THE LARGE SUGAR ESTATE AND REFINING CORPORATION IN WHICH GOTTA HOLDS MAJORITY SHARES WAS PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE ALL OUTSTANDING ISSUES WITH SUGAR WORKERS AND CANE FARMERS, BUT THAT GOTTA VETOED ANY PROFIT SHARING AGREEMENT OR RECOGNITION OF RAFFIQUE SHAH'S CANE FARMER ORGANIZATION (ICFTU).

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6. EFFORTS ARE REPORTEDLY UNDERWAY BY GOTTA TO BRING ABOUT A COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT BETWEEN TEXACO AND THE OWTU AND THEREBY REMOVE ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL FOCI FOR CURRENT WIDESPREAD LABOR ACTION. GOTTA TACTIC THUS MAY BE TO GET AN OWTU SETTLEMENT AND THEN LEAVE PANDAY AND SHAH STRANDED AND THE FRAGILE UNITY OF THE ULF IN DISARRAY. IT COULD WORK, SINCE IT IS STILL UNTESTED WHETHER THE OIL WORKERS WOULD STAY OUT ON STRIKE TO BACK THE EAST INDIAN SUGAR WORKERS AND FARMERS

IF THEIR OWN GRIEVANCES ARE SETTLED. THAT WOULD BRING ABOUT FIRST REAL HARD TEST OF THE POLITICAL STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY OF THE COALITION.

7. RAFFIQUE SHAH, HAS REPORTEDLY ARRANGED TO SURRENDER TO POLICE UNDER NEGOTIATED ARRANGEMENT WHEREBY HE WILL BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED ON BAIL WITH COMMITMENT NOT TO LEAD MARCHES UNTIL CASE HEARD. THIS IS SAME TREATMENT METED OTHER LEADERS AND BRINGS SHAH BACK OUT OF HIDING AND ABLE TO SPEAK IN THE OPEN AS WEEKES AND PANDAY ARE DOING.

8. A MEETING OF PARLIAMENT WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 21 HAS BEEN POSTPONED BY THE GOVERNMENT "BECAUSE BILLS WHICH WERE TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE SESSION ARE NOT YET PREPARED." THE POSTPONEMENT WAS OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO AVOID A PARLIAMENTARY DISCUSSION OF THE CURRENT UNREST WHICH HAD BEEN PROPOSED BY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ROY RICHARDSON.

9. HIGH OFFICIAL OF GOVT IN CONTACT WITH PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS STATED PRIVATELY TODAY THAT UP UNTIL YESTERDAY WILLIAMS WAS PLANNING TO DEPART NEXT WEEK TO MAKE SOME UNIVERSITY LECTURES IN CANADA. DESPITE CABINET EFFORTS TO DISSUADE HIM, WE UNDERSTAND HE IS STILL PLANNING TO GO. (COMMENT: THIS EPISODE FURTHER REINFORCES IMPRESSION OF WILLIAMS' RELATIVE DETACHMENT FROM CURRENT UNSETTLING EVENTS.)

10. WITH ELECTRIC POWER BACK ON (AND THEREFORE ALSO WATER AND TELEPHONES), THE PERSONAL INCONVENIENCE FOR THE AVERAGE CITIZEN IS CONSIDERABLY DECREASED. THIS APPEARS NOT TO BE SO MUCH A VICTORY BY THE GOVERNMENT AS A CONSCIOUS DECISION BY WEEKES AND HIS COLLEAGUES THAT IF THEY ANTAGONIZED THE GENERAL PUBLIC THROUGH PROLONGED INTERRUPTION OF POWER IT

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COULD WORK AGAINST THEIR LONG-TERM GOALS.

11. DESPITE FACT A FEW FILLING STATIONS RECEIVED GASOLINE TODAY, THE GENERAL FUEL SITUATION CONTINUES TO TIGHTEN. STREETS ARE ALMOST EMPTY OF TRAFFIC.

12. IN VIEW OF RELATIVE CALM AND FACT THAT LABOR STRUGGLE HAS MOVED OFF OF THE STREETS, WE WILL DISCONTINUE TWICE-DAILY SITREPS EFFECTIVE WITH THIS MESSAGE. DEVELOPMENTS WILL STILL BE REPORTED AS PERTINENT, AND IF TENSIONS AGAIN HEIGHTEN WE WILL RECOMMENCE SITREP REPORTING.

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